



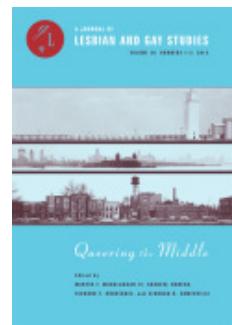
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My Body, My Closet: Invisible Disability and the Limits of Coming-Out Discourse

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MY BODY, MY CLOSET

Invisible Disability and the Limits of Coming-Out Discourse

Ellen Samuels

The Limits of Analogy

A story: On a breezy afternoon one April I met with “Samantha,” a student in an undergraduate course on literature and disability, to talk about her paper on cultural images of burn survivors. After showing me her draft, she remained, eager to talk about issues of disability and visibility, about her own experience as a person who appears “normal” until one looks closely enough to see the scars on her jaw and neck, the puckered skin that disappears under the neck of her T-shirt and reappears on her arm and wrist. Since I almost always look “normal” despite my disabling chronic illness, I sympathized with her struggle over how and when to come out about her disability identity. “My parents don’t understand why I would call myself disabled,” Samantha said matter-of-factly; then she added with a mischievous grin, “In fact, there are two basic things my family just doesn’t want to accept: that my cousin is gay and that I’m disabled. So we’re going to take a picture of ourselves at a gay pride march next month and send it to them.”

The moral: I admire Samantha’s wit and intelligence. I am also struck by the convergence of many themes in her story: the shifting and contested meanings of disability; the uneasy, often self-destroying tension between appearance and identity; the social scrutiny that refuses to accept statements of identity without “proof”; and, finally, the discursive and practical connections between coming out—in all the meanings of the term—as queer and as disabled. Thus I begin with Samantha’s story to frame a discussion not only of analogies between queerness and disability but of the specifics of coming out in each context as a person whose bodily appearance does not immediately signal one’s own sense of identity. In the first section of this essay I consider the complicated dynamics inherent in the analogizing of social identities, with specific reference to feminist, queer, and

disability studies. In the second section I turn to the politics of visibility and invisibility, drawing on autobiographical narratives as well as social theory to explore constructions of coming out or passing in a number of social contexts. In the third section I further explore these issues through a focus on two “invisible” identities: lesbian-femme and nonvisible disability.¹ Thus each section seeks to “queer” disability in order to develop new paradigms of identity, representation, and social interaction.

A number of disability theorists suggest that disability has more in common with sexual orientation than with race, ethnicity, or gender—other categories often invoked analogically to support the social model of disability.² One argument for this connection is that most people with disabilities, like most queers, do not share their identity with immediate family members and often have difficulty accessing queer or crip culture.³ The history of an oppressive medical model for homosexuality and the nature-nurture and assimilation-transformation debates in the modern LGBT civil rights movement offer additional areas of potential common ground with disability activism. Haunting such arguments, however, is the vexed issue of analogy itself, which cannot be extracted from the tangled history of the use and misuse of such identity analogies in past liberation movements.

In particular, most current analogies between oppressed social identities draw in some fashion on the sex-race analogy that emerged from the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s. This analogy was used primarily by white women to claim legitimacy for feminist political struggle by analogizing it to the struggle of African Americans for civil rights. The sex-race analogy has been extensively critiqued, most importantly by feminists of color, and has by now been renounced by most white feminists. The gist of such a critique is suggested by the title of Tina Grillo and Stephanie M. Wildman’s article “Obscuring the Importance of Race: The Implications of Making Comparisons between Racism and Sexism (or Other Isms),” and is summarized by Lisa Maria Hogeland:

First, in its use of *race*, it represents a fantastic vision of African-American identity, community, and politics—uncontested, uncontradictory, unproblematic—that is shaped by a simultaneous nostalgia for and forgetting of the Civil Rights Movement, as if identity, community, and politics had never been the subjects of struggle. Second, the analogy attempts to forge out of that nostalgia and forgetting an equally fantastic vision of a self-evident identity, community, and politics of *sex*, whether construed as gender or as sexuality. Third, implicit in the setting together of the two is a fantasy of coalition . . . [which] sidesteps the processes and practices that would make such coalition possible.⁴

Despite the validity of this critique, Hogeland observes that the sex-race analogy continues to function in feminist theory and has also emerged strongly in queer theory (45).

My own investigation of the analogies regarding disability, however, suggests that their use has transformed from a comparison between *similar* oppressions to a strategic *contrasting* of identities to elucidate a particular aspect of the primary identity under discussion. Such a transformation accords with the classic definition of analogy as based on “a similarity or resemblance of relations, in which the resemblance lies in the qualities of two or more objects that are essentially dissimilar.”⁵ In practice, such analogies often both create and rely on artificial dichotomies that not only produce inequality between the terms of comparison but exclude or elide anomalous experiences that do not fit easily within their terms.

For John Swain and Colin Cameron, strategic contrasting supports the claim that disability and sexual “preference” are both social labels that are “usually self-referent from only one side,” so that, unlike dual or multiple labels such as male and female, and black, Asian, Latina, and white, the labels of nondisabled and heterosexuality are always already presumed “unless otherwise stated.” Swain and Cameron conclude: “There is a coming out process for gay men and lesbian women which has no real equivalent in gender and race categorizations,” and “there is a similar coming out process for disabled people.”⁶ In this argument, the identities of gayness and disability are stabilized and opposed to those of gender and race. Such an analogy not only relies on an overly restrictive, unilateral view of gender and race but implies false equations between the two identities on each side of the opposition (gay = disabled; gender = race), thereby invoking the original sex-race analogy in a renewed form. While this analogy claims for sexual oppression the same legitimacy as that (supposedly) achieved for racial oppression—my experience is *like* your experience—contrasting analogies such as that employed by Swain and Cameron claim for gay or disabled oppression a different valence than that of gender or race: my experience is *different* from yours. Yet both analogies have the same goal—to persuade the listener of the validity and urgency of the speaker’s original experience—and thus both implicitly devalue the other term of comparison.

An important difference between the analogies of sex-race and sexual orientation–disability is that the former relates to oppressions, while the latter describes processes of liberation and self-actualization, in this case, “coming out.” Perhaps analogies between liberatory practices are less problematic than those

between oppressions, since they claim a sameness not of experience but of resistance. This argument has a certain logic; however, it does not address the deeper issue of the presumption of sameness that produces oversimplified “mapping analogies.” As Eve Tavor Bannet explains, the mapping analogy represents a historical mutation of analogy that, by “stressing resemblance over difference to make different entities more or less alike[,] transformed analogy into an equivalence—a rule of presumed resemblance, structural isomorphism, or homology between domains. The moment of essential difference which distinguishes analogy from identity, and different entities from each other, was flattened into a moment of proportional representation.”⁷ Clearly, the sex-race analogy suffers from the endemic flaws of the mapping analogy itself, yet all language functions in a sense through analogy, and so it remains an inescapable part of the communicative realm. Certainly, the tendency to make analogies between identities and liberation movements is pervasive and often persuasive, and so I suggest not that we attempt to escape from analogy but that we seek to employ it more critically than in the past.

Bannet examines a particular means of destabilizing and evolving mapping analogies through her discussion of Wittgenstein, for whom “analogy is not just an image, an extended simile, or the juxtaposition of objects of comparison. . . . analogy in Wittgenstein’s sense is a traditional method of reasoning from the known to the unknown, and from the visible to the speculative, by carrying familiar terms, paradigms, and images across into unfamiliar territory.”⁸ I find this model of analogy especially useful, both because of its acknowledgment of the instability of its terms and because of its foregrounding of the issue of visibility as a key component of analogical language. Indeed, when we consider that “theories and practices of identity and subject formation in Western culture are largely structured around the logic of visibility, whether in the service of science (Victorian physiognomy), psychoanalysis (Lacan’s mirror stage), or philosophy (Foucault’s reading of the Panopticon),” it becomes apparent that the speculative or “invisible” has generally functioned as the subordinate term in analogical equations to this date.⁹ Thus a central premise of this essay is that it behooves us to refocus our endeavors from the visible signs of these identities to their invisible manifestations. The focus on specularity and visible difference that permeates much disability theory creates a dilemma not only for nonvisibly disabled people who wish to enter the conversation but for the overarching concepts of disability and normalization themselves.¹⁰ Passing, closeting, and coming out become vexed issues that strain at the limitations of the discourse meant to describe them.

The Limits of Visibility

Coming out, then, for disabled people, is a process of redefinition of one's personal identity through rejecting the tyranny of the *normate*, positive recognition of impairment and embracing disability as a valid social identity. Having come out, the disabled person no longer regards disability as a reason for self-disgust, or as something to be denied or hidden, but rather as an imposed oppressive social category to be challenged and broken down. . . . Coming out, in our analysis, involves a political commitment. Acceptance of a medical model of disability and being categorized by others as disabled does not constitute coming out as disabled.

—Swain and Cameron, “Unless Otherwise Stated”

One of the limitations of Swain and Cameron's analogy between coming out as gay or lesbian and coming out as disabled is their one-sided definition of coming out itself. For these writers, coming out refers specifically to accepting one's “true” identity and must entail identification with the political analysis of the marginalized group. In both queer and disabled contexts, however, coming out can entail a variety of meanings, acts, and commitments. The dual meanings most crucial to my argument can be signified grammatically: to “come out *to*” a person or group usually refers to a specific revelatory event, while to “come out” (without an object) usually refers to the time that one first realized and came to terms with one's own identity. When *coming out* is considered as a self-contained phrase, as in Swain and Cameron's article, we may grant some validity to the observation that “people with hidden impairments are sometimes less likely to ‘come out’ as disabled, and move to a positive acceptance of difference and a political identity, because it is easier to maintain a ‘normal’ identity.”¹¹ However, when we add the preposition *to* to the phrase, the above statement becomes almost an oxymoron: the narratives of people with “hidden impairments,” like those of people with other nonvisible social identities, are suffused with themes of coming out, passing, and the imperatives of identity.

Nor is coming out a static and singular event, as Swain and Cameron imply, an over-the-rainbow shift that divides one's life before and after the event. Certainly, there must be some people who experience such momentous comings out, but I believe that the majority of us find that, even after our own internal shift, and even after a dozen gay pride marches, we must still make decisions about coming out on a daily basis, in personal, professional, and political contexts. In *Dress*

Codes, Noelle Howey's memoir about her father's transition from male to female, she describes four separate moments of her father's coming out: when he told her mother, when her mother told her, when the family threw a party for Noelle's father to come out as female to friends and coworkers, and when Noelle's father came out to her years later as a lesbian.¹² Eli Clare writes of coming out as a complex convergence of identities and desires: "My coming out wasn't as much about discovering sexual desire and knowledge as it was about dealing with gender identity. Simply put, the disabled, mixed-class tomboy who asked her mother, 'am I feminine?' didn't discover a sexuality among dykes but rather a definition of woman large enough to be comfortable for many years."¹³

When we look at narratives of disabled people about their own coming-out processes, we see that the language of coming out is used liberally but often carries very different meanings. While many of these stories emphasize connections with a disability community, much as Swain and Cameron suggest, they also demonstrate the various methods and implications that coming out entails for different individuals. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, who calls her book *Extraordinary Bodies* "the consequence of a coming-out process," describes how she had long thought of her congenital disability as a "private matter" and did not identify with disability culture or disabled people, although she did feel a special connection with disabled characters in the literature she studied.¹⁴ Deciding to focus her scholarly work on disability was both a cause and a consequence of her coming to identify with the disability community. Similarly, Nomy Lamm, born with one leg, did not come out as disabled until late in her teens, when, through her involvement in queer and feminist activism, she met two other "freaky crip girls" and transitioned fairly quickly from "I'm not really disabled, and even if I am, nobody notices" to "I am a foxy one-legged dyke, and you will love it, or else."¹⁵

Not all coming-out processes are so straightforward. Carolyn Gage writes: "Did I come out? Not at first. I told my friends I had CFIDS [chronic fatigue immune dysfunction syndrome], but I did not really tell them what that meant. . . . When I did go places with friends, I passed for able-bodied as much as I could."¹⁶ For Gage, coming out did not take place until nearly a decade after she first fell ill, and it took the form of a letter to her friends that explicitly spelled out her disability, her limitations, and what she needed in terms of accommodation and support. Perhaps because of the nonvisible, contingent, and fluctuating nature of chronic illness, as opposed to the disabilities of Garland-Thomson and Lamm, Gage's coming-out process was not primarily focused on claiming the label of "disability." Rather, it required her to construct a specific narrative explaining her body to a skeptical, ignorant, and somewhat hostile audience. Susan Wendell, who also has

CFIDS, speaks of the difficulty of convincing people to take her word for it regarding her abilities: “Some people offer such acceptance readily, others greet every statement of limitation with skepticism, and most need to be reminded from time to time.”¹⁷

What is notable in Gage’s and Wendell’s accounts is that coming out is primarily portrayed as the process of revealing or explaining one’s disability *to* others, rather than as an act of self-acceptance facilitated by a disability community. I would suggest that the nonvisible nature of Gage’s and Wendell’s disabilities means that, for them, the primary meaning of coming out includes the term *to* and connotes the daily challenge of negotiating assumptions about bodily appearance and function. This dynamic is not limited to those with chronic illnesses but can also be found in narratives by people with a range of nonvisible disabilities, especially sensory disabilities.¹⁸ Megan Jones, a deaf-blind woman, writes of her response to the ubiquitous question “So, how bad is your vision and hearing anyway? I mean, you seem to get around pretty good as far as I can tell.”¹⁹ Jones admits that she once felt obliged to respond with an extended narrative explaining exactly the permeability of her cornea and the sound frequencies she could detect. Georgina Kleege writes about her need “to identify [her] blindness in public,” particularly in the classroom, so that her students will understand why she cannot see them raising their hands. Kleege also writes of situations in which she chooses *not* to mention her blindness, such as social settings and a previous job, largely to avoid patronizing reactions or the suspicion of fraud but also simply because her “blindness was an irrelevant fact that they did not need to know about me, like my religion or political affiliation.”²⁰

Kleege’s account points to the flip side of having to come out to be recognized as disabled: the ability to pass. Like racial, gender, and queer passing, the option of passing as nondisabled provides both a certain level of privilege and a profound sense of misrecognition and internal dissonance. Kleege reflects ruefully on a circumstance in which, during a flight on which nondisabled passengers and flight attendants were ignoring or complaining about a wheelchair-using passenger, she did not come out: “Because my disability was invisible to them, it allowed them to assume I felt about the disabled as they did, that I would have behaved as they had.”²¹ Even though Kleege and her husband were the only passengers who assisted the wheelchair user, and Kleege came out to *her* as blind, she still expresses profound guilt that she failed to identify herself as a member of the woman’s community to the airline staff and other passengers.

This dilemma can be even more complicated for those with a disability whose symptoms and severity fluctuate widely. Wendell writes:

Because my disability is no longer readily apparent, and because it is an illness whose symptoms vary greatly from day to day, I live between the world of the disabled and the non-disabled. I am often very aware of my differences from healthy, non-disabled people, and I often feel a great need to have my differences acknowledged when they are ignored. . . . On the other hand, I am very aware of how my social, economic, and personal resources, and the fact that I can “pass” as non-disabled among strangers, allow me to live a highly assimilated life among the non-disabled.²²

Wendell then emphasizes that, even when she herself passes as nondisabled, she makes a point of identifying herself with the disability community and working for disability rights. Thus she complicates the assumption of a direct relationship between visible impairment and political identification with disability rights, as well as crucially undermining the related claim that passing as “normal” is by definition a form of negative disability identity.²³

Nevertheless, the perception persists that nonvisibly disabled people prefer to pass and that passing is a sign and product of assimilationist longings: “By passing as non-disabled, by minimizing the significance of their impairments within their own personal and social lives . . . people with hidden impairments often make an effort to avoid the perceived stigma attached to a disabled identity.” Even when passing is acknowledged as a valid strategy for negotiating certain situations, it is portrayed as an undesirable response: “If . . . disabled people pursue normalization too much, they risk denying limitations and pain for the comfort of others and may edge into the self-betrayal associated with ‘passing.’”²⁴ I do not deny that some nonvisibly disabled people may wish to assimilate or choose to pass; however, I believe that such an overall negative perception of passing exceeds the reality and must be interpreted in the context of other forms of bodily passing in Euro-American culture. As Lisa Walker observes: “Traditionally, passing (for straight, for white) has been read as a conservative form of self-representation that the subject chooses in order to assume the privileges of the dominant identity. Passing is the sign of the sell out” and of the victim.²⁵

Such condemnations of passing often conflate two dynamics: passing deliberately (as implied by the term *hidden*) and passing by default, as it were. I certainly do not make any effort to appear “heterosexual” or “nondisabled” when I leave the house in the morning; those are simply the identities usually derived from my appearance by onlookers. While there are a number of queer accoutrements, such as buttons, stickers, jewelry, and T-shirts, that I could (and often do) choose to wear to signal my lesbian identity, a very different cultural weight is

placed on any attempt to signal a disabled identity, as suspicions of fraud attach to any visible sign of disability that is not functionally essential. The analogy between coming out as queer and coming out as disabled breaks down as the different meanings and consequences of such acts come into consideration.

My quandary is not unique, nor is my search for a nonverbal sign. Deborah Peifer observes that “I don’t look blind, so strangers, sisters, don’t realize that I’m not seeing them. After so many years of being defiantly out of the closet as a lesbian, I am, in some ways, passing as sighted. Other than wearing a ‘Yes, I am legally blind’ sign, I don’t know of any way to provide that information to strangers.” Jones became so frustrated with strangers not believing in her visual and hearing impairments, and so oppressed by their refusal to respect her assistance dog’s status, that she began to use a white cane she did not need: “I find that when I use a cane people leave me alone. . . . people go right into their Blind-Person-With-A-Cane-And-Guide-Dog Red Alert mode.” Kleege also mentions that “I now carry a white cane as a nonverbal sign that I don’t see as much as I seem to. But like a lot of blind people who carry canes and employ guide dogs, these signs are not always understood, and the word still needs to be spoken.”²⁶ These writers each contend with cultural assumptions that the identity they wish to signal exists only as visible physical difference. Since race, in Euro-American culture, is also assumed to be immediately visible and intelligible, Toi Derricotte, a light-skinned African American woman, writes of wishing for “a cross, a star, some sign of gold to wear so that, before they wonder or ask, I can present a dignified response to the world’s interrogations.”²⁷ In this case, coming out as disabled appears to have more in common with racial discourses of coming out or passing than with queer discourse, since the contingent (non)visibility of queer identity has produced a variety of nonverbal and/or spoken means to signal that identity, while the assumed visibility of race and disability has produced an absence of nonverbal signs and a distrust of spoken claims to those identities.

In the absence of recognized nonverbal signs, we often resort to the “less dignified” response of claiming identity through speech. The complex longing, fear of disbelief, and internal dissonance caused by coming out in this form resound through the narratives of all people who pass by default. Passing subjects must cope with a variety of external social contexts, few of which welcome or acknowledge spontaneous declarations of invisible identity. Derricotte writes that “for several years I wore my identity like a banner. ‘Hello, I’m Toi Derricotte, I’m black.’” The awkwardness of such revelations is amplified in Peifer’s account of how she chose to voice her lesbian identity after blindness prevented her from participating in the subtle visual signals with which queer people in public often

acknowledge each other: “They now know at the grocery store (‘As a lesbian, I wish to buy these peaches’) and the drugstore (‘As a lesbian, I wish to explain that the yeast infection for which I am purchasing this ointment was the result of taking antibiotics, not heterosexual intercourse’).”²⁸ Clearly, simply voicing one’s identity in any and all situations is a far-from-perfect solution to the dilemmas presented by invisibility. In addition, the general cultural prejudice against such statements means that embarrassment may be the least disturbing negative response they evoke.

Suspicious of fraud often greet declarations of nonvisible identity. As Amanda Hamilton writes, people with nonvisible disabilities “are in a sense forced to pass, and the same time assumed to be liars.” Adrian Piper, a light-skinned African American, also writes of the catch-22 of remaining silent versus speaking up: “For most of my life I did not understand that I needed to identify my racial identity publicly and that if I did not I would be inevitably mistaken for white. I simply didn’t think about it. But since I also made no special effort to hide my racial identity, I often experienced the shocked and/or hostile reactions of whites who discovered it after the fact.” Piper adds that “some whites simply can’t take my avowed racial affiliation at face value, and react to what they see rather than what I say.”²⁹ It takes tremendous chutzpah for nonvisibly disabled people to assert our disabilities in public settings or to ask for accommodation; denial, mockery, and silent disapproval are some of the cultural mechanisms used to inhibit us. While nonvisibly disabled people are usually required to produce medical documentation of our impairments, people who pass racially, like Derricotte and Piper, face semantic battles, interrogations about their ancestry, and challenges to their dedication to the African American community.³⁰

Derricotte’s memoir, *The Black Notebooks*, is an expanded meditation on race, passing, and the self. In the chapter “Diaries at an Artist’s Colony” she describes hearing a racist comment on her first night at the colony and not confronting the speaker. Later, in a section of that chapter called “Coming Out,” she concedes that “I [was] afraid to come out as a black person, to bear that solitude, that hatred, that invisibility.”³¹ Here Derricotte locates invisibility *not* as equivalent to passing but as the alienating consequence of coming out in a hostile context. When she does come out later to a white woman, the woman’s resistance ironically foregrounds the white colonists’ own anxiety about race:

She said, “There aren’t any black people here. I haven’t seen any.”
 “Yes there are,” I said, smiling.
 “Who?”

“You’re looking at one.”

“You’re not really black. Just an eighth or something.” . . .

A woman at the table said, “Did you read that article in *The New York Times* that said if they were strict about genetics, sixty percent of the people in the United States would be classified as black?”

I looked around the table; I was laughing. The others were not. They were worried about how black I was and they should have been worrying about how black *they* were. (145)

Derricotte’s story can be read as a narrative enactment of Elaine Ginsberg’s observation that “passing forces reconsideration of the cultural logic that the physical body is the site of identic intelligibility.”³² Derricotte reverses the terms of the racial dichotomy black/white to refocus racial anxiety onto whiteness as an artificial cultural construct, in a move that reflects Wittgenstein’s reversal of analogy to lead us “from what we suppose *is* the case everywhere to what *might* happen otherwise in particular cases.”³³ While Derricotte’s coming out was necessary for the scene to unfold, her passing provided the foundational meaning of the exchange. Thus we see how passing can become a subversive practice and how the passing subject may be read not as an assimilationist victim but as a defiant figure who, by crossing the borders of identities, reveals their instability.³⁴

The Limits of Subversion

A story: When a friend of mine read the story of Samantha with which this essay opens, she asked why Samantha would identify as disabled. I did not have a concrete answer for her. Faced with that question, many of us might point to our Social Security status, our medical records, our neurological test results, or the signs of difference on our bodies. I cannot tell you where Samantha would point. I can only observe the pride with which she claims her identity, the eagerness with which she seeks to communicate it to others. I can only conclude that, for Samantha, “being disabled” means being not a victim, not a special case, but a member of a proud and fierce community.

Her attitude is refreshing. It demonstrates the usefulness of analogizing concepts of pride between queer and disability contexts. As I continue in this section to investigate the complex dynamics of passing and visibility by examining two contemporary identities—lesbian-femme and nonvisible disability—issues of pride, resistance, and subversion come to the fore. While I myself claim both identities, that is not the main reason I chose them. When reading about coming

out and queer identity, I found that writings that questioned the politics of visibility largely focused on the controversial category of lesbian-femme. Similarly, in both the disability community and the field of disability studies, the question of nonvisible disability is emerging as a highly vexed, profoundly challenging concern. Embodying both identities as I do, I naturally notice connections between the experiences they produce; at the same time, I am also aware of the significant differences and contradictions between those experiences.³⁵ To begin with, we may briefly examine some of the interesting correspondences and contrasts between these identities. Considering Joan Nestle's suggestion that "if the butch deconstructs gender, the femme constructs gender," what useful trains of thought can we set into motion by analogizing *butch/femme* and *gender* to *visibly/nonvisibly disabled* and *ability*, and what are the inherent problems of such an analogy?³⁶

Both femme lesbians and people with nonvisible disabilities present what Marjorie Garber calls a "category crisis."³⁷ In the dominant cultural discourse, as well as in lesbian and disability subcultures, certain assumptions about the correlation between appearance and identity have resulted in an often exclusive focus on visibility as both the basis of community and the means of enacting social change. Discourses of coming out and passing are central to visibility politics, in which coming out is generally valorized while passing is seen as assimilationist. Thus vigilant resistance to external stereotypes of disability and lesbianism has not kept our subcultures from enacting dynamics of exclusion and surveillance over their members. Nor does a challenge to those dynamics necessarily imply a wish on my part to discard visibility politics or a rejection of the value and importance of visibility for marginalized communities. As Walker observes:

The impulse to privilege the visible often arises out of the need to reclaim signifiers of difference which dominant ideologies have used to define minority identities negatively. But while this strategy of reclamation is often affirming, it can also replicate the practices of the dominant ideologies which use visibility to create social categories on the basis of exclusion. The paradigm of visibility is totalizing when a signifier of difference becomes synonymous with the identity it signifies. In this situation, members of a given population who do not bear that signifier of difference or who bear visible signs of another identity are rendered invisible and are marginalized within an already marginalized community.³⁸

Moreover, people with nonvisible disabilities not only are marginalized in disability communities but walk an uneasy line between those communities and the dom-

inant culture, often facing significant discrimination because our identities are unrecognized or disbelieved.

The history of femme identity in Euro-American culture, much like that of nonvisible disabilities, is one of indeterminacy and ambiguity: “The femme woman has been the most ambiguous figure in lesbian history; she is often described as the nonlesbian lesbian, the duped wife of the passing woman, the lesbian who marries.”³⁹ Extending Terry Castle’s analysis of the “apparitional lesbian,” Walker suggests that “the feminine lesbian . . . perhaps more than any other figure for same-sex desire, ‘haunts the edges of the field of vision.’” The sexologists who first named lesbianism in the early twentieth century had difficulty describing femmes except as dupes of the masculine “inverts” on whom their theories centered, since “the feminine lesbian produces a collapse at the intersection of the systems of marking and visibility that underpin the theory of inversion.”⁴⁰ During the rise of lesbian feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, femme lesbians were shunned for supposedly copying heterosexual roles and buying into misogynist beauty standards. In the early 1990s, with the publication of Nestle’s groundbreaking anthology, *The Persistent Desire*, many femme writers and activists began to speak out in defense of their identities and to protest “the penalties we have had to pay because we look like ‘women’—from straight men, from so-called radical feminists, and from some lesbian separatists who, because of their anger at the social construction of femininity, cannot allow us to even exist.” Yet Rebecca Ann Rugg, a member of the generation following Nestle’s, still describes facing “two constant problems for a nineties femme: invisibility as a dyke and how to authenticate herself as one despite doubt and rudeness from others.”⁴¹

Rugg’s comment also rings true for the experiences of many people with nonvisible disabilities, who face not only uneasy inclusion in the disability community but a daily struggle for accommodation and benefits that reflects the dominant culture’s insistence on visible signs to legitimate impairment. The very diversity of nonvisible disabilities, which include a wide range of impairments, such as chronic and terminal illness, sensory impairment, learning and cognitive differences, mental illness, and repetitive strain injuries, presents a category crisis. While I do not claim to present a comprehensive range of impairments among the authors I cite, a reading of numerous narratives across impairments suggests a common experience structured by the disbelieving gaze of the normate (much as theorists such as Garland-Thomson and Lennard J. Davis argue that disability is constructed via the normate’s stare confronted by people with visible disability).⁴²

In an intriguing twist, Cal Montgomery rejects the distinction between vis-

ible and nonvisible disabilities and instead points to contradictions between “tools,” behaviors, and social expectations:

The person who uses a white cane when getting on the bus, but then pulls out a book to read while riding; the person who uses a wheelchair to get into the library stacks, but then stands up to reach a book on a high shelf; the person who uses a picture-board to discuss philosophy; the person who challenges the particular expectations of *disability* that other people have is suspect. “I can’t see what’s wrong with him,” people say, meaning, “He’s not acting the way I think he should.” “She’s invisibly disabled,” they say, meaning, “I can’t see what barriers she faces.”⁴³

Montgomery’s examples illustrate the category crisis evoked by invisible and nonvisible disabilities. These contradictions among appearance, behavior, and social expectations are, of course, embodied as well in the figure of the femme: “Women who look and act like girls and who desire girls. We’re just the queerest of the queers.”⁴⁴

Yet there are significant differences between nonvisible disability and femme identity. Nestle writes of the “bitter irony” that while “in the straight world, butches bear the brunt of the physical and verbal abuse for their difference, in the lesbian-feminist world, femmes have had to endure a deeper attack on their sense of self-worth.”⁴⁵ This remark highlights an important distinction, for it appears that femme lesbians are marginalized primarily in lesbian subculture, while people with nonvisible disabilities write more often of the frustration and discrimination they face in the dominant culture. Thus passing and coming out take on different valences with regard to these different identities. However, as we have seen, these different valences are translated into the theoretical fields based on those identities, that is, queer theory and disability studies, in intriguingly similar fashions.

The difficulty of circulating in the dominant culture as a femme is largely produced by unwanted attention from men and by the general assumption that one is heterosexual. Combined with denigration and misrecognition in the lesbian community, these dynamics can cause significant frustration and alienation for femmes: “Femme is *loquería* ['the crazies']. Having your identity constantly under question, who wouldn’t risk losing their mind, and their identity along the way?”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, there appears to be a wide difference between that alienation and the harassment, discrimination, and economic repercussions experienced by non-visibly disabled people in the culture at large. Many write of being denied bene-

fits and accommodations because their nonvisible disabilities are perceived as minor or imaginary.⁴⁷ Nonvisibly disabled people who use disabled parking permits are routinely challenged and harassed by strangers.⁴⁸ Recently, a sympathetic nondisabled friend of mine told me that a colleague of hers had reported triumphantly her detection of someone using a disabled parking permit illegally. The colleague's conclusion was based on the fact that the woman she saw getting out of the car was young and "well-groomed" and had no sign of a limp. In addition, the colleague continued, she had followed the woman closely as they entered the building and had ascertained that she was breathing "normally" and so could have no respiratory impairments. Such constant and invasive surveillance of nonvisibly disabled bodies is the result of a convergence of complicated cultural discourses regarding independence, fraud, malingering, and entitlement; the form it takes almost always involves a perceived discontinuity between appearance, behavior, and identity.

It is useful here to consider Foucault's interpretation of the Panopticon as a cultural mechanism that, among its other uses, functions to "distinguish 'laziness and stubbornness'" and "to put beggars and idlers to work." Foucault invokes the Panopticon, a nineteenth-century prison design in which a central watchtower is surrounded by individual windowed cells, as the metaphoric basis for contemporary surveillance of and by individual members of society. The Panopticon's power is to "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."⁴⁹ Thus the Panopticon-like surveillance promoted by cultural myths of fraud ensures that, just as "the Other named as invisible is unseen as an individual, while simultaneously [it is] hyper-visible as a stereotype," the nonvisibly disabled subject is rendered hypervisible through social scrutiny and surveillance.⁵⁰ Thus many nonvisibly disabled people may feel that our choice is between passing and performing the dominant culture's stereotypes of disability: "Many people are more comfortable relating to me and accommodating me if they can be absolutely certain that I am who I say I am, a deaf-blind person. And they are not absolutely certain that I am that person until I bump into a wall or shape my hands into what is to them an incomprehensible language. In other words, I must make myself completely alien to these people in order for them to feel that they understand me."⁵¹

In contrast to this general cultural reaction to nonvisible disability, the disability community, while still largely structured around visible disabilities, is increasingly cognizant and welcoming of nonvisibly disabled people. There are certainly exceptions, which often seem to arise in connection with questions of access to disability-centered events, such as conferences.⁵² Nevertheless, a large

body of writing criticizing the disability community for excluding those with non-visible disabilities simply does not exist. In contrast, the vast majority of twentieth-century American writings on femme identity make some reference to feeling excluded, ignored, or belittled in the larger lesbian community. I have already discussed the history of the lesbian feminist movement's rejection of femme identity, as well as the contemporary response. Both Rugg and Walker suggest that queer theory, which challenges categories of gender and desire, may have indirectly contributed an epistemological basis for the latest devaluing of femme identity: Rugg writes that "femme circulates as a term of derision" in many dyke spaces, particularly in the "pomo dyke scene," which emphasizes gender bending and androgyny.⁵³ Similarly, I would suggest that, while disability studies has presented profound challenges to dominant cultural conceptions of the body, social identity, and independence, it has not provided the theoretical basis on which to critique and transform the equation of appearance with ability. Instead, its focus on the visual continues to render nonvisible disabilities *invisible* while reinforcing the exact cultural reliance on visibility that oppresses all of us.

Walker suggests that "the femme can be read as the 'blind spot' in [Judith] Butler's notion of gender as a performance."⁵⁴ I have often felt a similar gap in disability studies texts, even as I have benefited hugely from many of their insights. Their focus on visuality and the "gaze" sometimes leads me to question if my extremely limiting and life-changing health condition really qualifies as a disability according to the social model. Such anxieties open up larger questions regarding the shifting definition of disability and the **need to resist hierarchies of oppression.**

In a phrase that echoes the experiences of people with nonvisible disabilities, Rugg observes that "daily lives lived femme constantly require negotiating problems of visibility," but she subverts the victimizing potential of this observation with its conclusion: "Thus, there are innumerable examples of radical and subversive performances of femme in every imaginable context."⁵⁵ Mykel Johnson also argues for an interpretation of femme as subversive performance:

It seems to me that femme dykes, as well as butch dykes, fuck with gender. We are not passing as straight women. Lesbian femme is not the same as "feminine." . . . a femme dyke is not trying to be discreet. There is something in femme, in fact, that is about creating a display. A femme dyke displays the erotic power of her beauty. She is bold enough to claim that power in a culture that has maintained a tyranny of "beauty norms" that may or may not include her. . . . A femme dyke is not domesticated but wild.⁵⁶

It is challenging, however, to imagine nonvisible disability as a subversive display. While many markers of femme identity carry erotic significance and are linked to a fundamental discourse of desire, markers of nonvisible disability tend to carry medical significance and be linked to fundamental discourses of illness. However, it is possible for nonvisibly disabled people, like femme lesbians, to choose to ally ourselves with individuals visibly marked by their shared identity; as Rugg insists, “Those of us perceived as acceptable by an assimilationist politics must constantly show our alliance to people marked as stereotypical.”⁵⁷

Furthermore, some clues may be given for the possibility of such subversive performance from the narratives of people with multiple identities, including femme and disabled. Mary Frances Platt writes of her struggle to reclaim femme identity after becoming disabled as an adult:

The more disabled I became, the more I mourned the ways my sexual femme self had manifested through the nondisabled me. . . . It's been five years now since I began using a wheelchair. I am just awakening to a new reclamation of femme. . . . An outrageous, loud-mouthed femme who's learning to dress, dance, cook, *and* seduce on wheels; finding new ways to be gloriously fucked by handsome butches and aggressive femmes. I hang out more with the sexual outlaws now—you know, the motorcycle lesbians who see wheels and chrome between your legs as something exciting, the leather women whose vision of passion and sexuality doesn't exclude fat, disabled me.⁵⁸

Like Platt, Sharon Wachsler found a new source of “femmeness” in herself after being forced to relinquish many external signifiers and behaviors of femme: “Because of my chemical sensitivities, I had to throw out all my personal-care products, including perfume, hair-styling aids and cosmetics. . . . Now that I could no longer attend those [queer] events or wear the clothing, makeup and accessories that went with them, was I still femme? Where is the meaning in being femme if I'm absent from the queer women's community and have lost the markers of femme identity?” Since becoming disabled, Wachsler has learned to value aspects of herself that she once considered “too femme,” such as accepting help from others. By creating accessible spaces in which to enact her new femme identity, Wachsler has reconnected with its meaning: “I carry my femmeness inside me like a red satin cushion. It comforts me. It gives me a place to rest. It sets me aglow with color. And I know that when it can, my femme flare will emerge glittering.”⁵⁹

Platt's and Wachsler's transformations indicate a merging of femme and disability identities that produces a third identity, "disabled femme," one intriguing example of "disability queered." This identity can be understood as well through Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "*mestiza* consciousness": "The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her [the *mestiza*] a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended."⁶⁰ Gaby Sandoval, a Chicana nondisabled femme, draws on Anzaldúa's work when she revises passing into a positive strategy by suggesting that her experience as a Chicana who grew up "passing the border" between the United States and Mexico gave her the skills to negotiate the ambiguities of mixed-race and femme identity: "I am at home in my discomfort. I am a queer child; never quite fitting in, but always passing. I am a femme who exploits the confines of gender perceptions. . . . These abilities are definitely telling of a life lived on the border, with all of its contradictions and confusions."⁶¹ Similarly, Willy Wilkinson, a disabled Asian American transperson, writes of a merging of border identities that inform and empower one another:

The thing about mixed [race] people is that, like transgendered people, we are stealth. You don't always see us coming, and you can't be so sure about what you're dealing with. . . . I'm accustomed to cultural conflict and surprise with the same intimacy that I know the terrain of my features and the hues of my skin. . . . How fitting to become disabled with an illness [CFIDS] rife with ambiguity and complexity, one whose very realness is questioned. It's the story of my life.⁶²

In each of these cases, *mestiza* consciousness emerges not simply as a combination of factors but as a praxis of embodied identities that occupies the border as homeland. Femme identity and nonvisible disability can both benefit from such examples, which urge us to find subversion at the meeting points between our bodies and our chosen communities, between our voices and the resistant audiences of power. In addition, by queering disability in these ways, we offer the larger fields of queer and disability studies new possibilities beyond simple analogizing as we explore "unfamiliar territory" together.

The moral: Recently, I met with Samantha to show her a draft of this essay, to see if my memory and representation of our encounter matched her own recollection. After reading my words, she showed me prints of the photo-essay she is constructing for her senior thesis: black-and-white shots of the gnarled skin of her hands juxtaposed against other landscapes: cypress bark, deep-sea sponges,

the surface of San Francisco Bay. These images will be juxtaposed with head shots of disabled and nondisabled people covering their faces with their hands, hiding their identities behind their smooth skin. In a way, Samantha is my opposite: her disability lives on the skin, while mine hides beneath it. But as we work toward one another, I begin to believe that the skin, the boundary between us, can be our homeland, our shared definition.

Notes

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1. In current disability discourse, the terms *invisible disability* and *nonvisible disability* are often used interchangeably. Yet while the term *invisible* may be used in a literal sense to signify an unmarked social identity, the metaphor of invisibility has long been used to indicate the marginality or oppression of a social group. Thus disability discourse (like queer theory and other liberatory movements) also employs metaphors of visibility that are unmoored from any question of marked or unmarked bodies. To minimize confusion in this essay, I employ *nonvisible* to indicate the condition of unmarked identity and *invisible* to indicate social oppression and marginality. However, I also seek to investigate how the two meanings and conditions intersect, since nonvisible disabilities remain largely invisible, both in disability discourse and in the culture at large.
2. For a prominent example of the disability/sexual orientation analogy see John Swain and Colin Cameron, “Unless Otherwise Stated: Discourses of Labelling and Identity in Coming Out,” in *Disability Discourse*, ed. Mairian Corker and Sally French (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), 68–78. Tom Shakespeare analogizes disability to gender, sexual orientation, and race in “Disability, Identity, and Difference,” in *Exploring the Divide: Illness and Disability*, ed. Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer (Leeds: Disability, 1996), 94–113. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and Susan Wendell both make frequent analogies between disability and gender. See Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (New York: Routledge, 1996). Garland-Thomson also argues for a view of disability as ethnicity, but she invokes sexual orientation only with regard to nonvisible disability, which, “much like a homosexual identity, always presents the dilemma of whether or when to come out or to pass” (14). Lennard J. Davis, however, defines disability both in analogies to race, gender, and class and in contrast to them in *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), xvi, 2.

3. See Shakespeare, “Disability, Identity, and Difference,” 105; and Wendell, *Rejected Body*, 82.
4. Tina Grillo and Stephanie M. Wildman, “Obscuring the Importance of Race: The Implications of Making Comparisons between Racism and Sexism (or Other Isms),” in *Critical White Studies: Looking behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 619–26; Lisa Maria Hogeland, “Invisible Man and Invisible Women: The Sex/Race Analogy of the 1970s,” *Women’s History Review* 5 (1996): 46.
5. Nilli Diengott, “Analogy As a Critical Term: A Survey and Some Comments,” *Style* 19 (1985): 228.
6. Swain and Cameron, “Unless Otherwise Stated,” 68. The example of “black, Asian, Latina, and white” is one that I have extrapolated from Swain and Cameron’s article rather than one that they themselves offer.
7. Eve Tavor Bannet, “Analogy As Translation: Wittgenstein, Derrida, and the Law of Language,” *New Literary History* 28 (1997): 658.
8. Ibid., 655.
9. Linda Schlossberg, introduction to *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion*, ed. María Carla Sánchez and Linda Schlossberg (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 1.
10. Davis writes that “disability is a specular moment” and argues that all disability, even mental illness, “shows up as a disruption in the visual field” (*Enforcing Normalcy*, xvi, 11–15, 129–42). Garland-Thomson also focuses on the “stare” that constructs the category of disability (*Extraordinary Bodies*, 26); Kenny Fries uses a similar focus (*Staring Back: The Disability Experience from the Inside Out* [New York: Plume, 1997], 1).
11. Tom Shakespeare, Kath Gillespie-Sells, and Dominic Davies, *The Sexual Politics of Disability: Untold Desires* (New York: Cassell, 1996), 55. These authors clearly share Swain and Cameron’s definition of coming out, as seen in their summary on page 58.
12. From a private conversation with Noelle Howey, July 2001. Howey further discusses her experiences in *Dress Codes: Of Three Girlhoods—My Mother’s, My Father’s, and Mine* (New York: Picador, 2002).
13. Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End, 1999), 133.
14. Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, ix.
15. Nomy Lamm, “Private Dancer: Evolution of a Freak,” in *Restricted Access: Lesbians on Disability*, ed. Victoria A. Brownworth and Susan Raffo (Seattle: Seal, 1999), 160–61.
16. Carolyn Gage, “Hidden Disability: A Coming Out Story,” in Brownworth and Russo, *Restricted Access*, 203. CFIDS is a debilitating systemic illness that primarily affects the neurological, immune, and muscular systems. It is also known as myalgic encephalomyelitis. For more detail see Peggy Munson, ed., *Stricken: Voices from the Hidden Epidemic of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome* (New York: Haworth, 2000).

17. Wendell, *Rejected Body*, 4.
18. This dynamic can be found as well in the writings of people with visible disabilities who ponder whether to “come out” textually, thus revealing their absent bodies much as nonvisibly disabled people who come out are revealing some aspect of their health or mental status. As Nancy Mairs reflects in *Waist-High in the World: A Life among the Nondisabled* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), “I might have chosen to write in such a way as to disregard or deny or disguise the fact that I have MS” (10).
19. Megan Jones, “‘Gee, You Don’t Look Handicapped . . .’: Why I Use a White Cane to Tell People That I’m Deaf,” *Electric Edge*, July–August 1997, accessed on 10 July 2002 at www.ragged-edge-mag.com/archive/look.htm.
20. Georgina Kleege, *Sight Unseen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 11–12.
21. *Ibid.*, 38–39.
22. Wendell, *Rejected Body*, 76.
23. See Shakespeare, “Disability, Identity, and Difference,” 100.
24. Swain and Cameron, “Unless Otherwise Stated,” 76; Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 13.
25. Lisa Walker, *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 8.
26. Deborah Peifer, “Seeing Is Be(liev)ing,” in Brownworth and Russo, *Restricted Access*, 34; Jones, “‘Gee, You Don’t Look Handicapped . . .’”; Kleege, *Sight Unseen*, 39.
27. Toi Derricotte, *The Black Notebooks: An Interior Journey* (New York: Norton, 1997), 112.
28. *Ibid.*, 111; Peifer, “Seeing Is Be(live)ing,” 34.
29. Amanda Hamilton, “Oh the Joys of Invisibility!” letter to the editor, *Electric Edge*, July–August 1997, accessed on 10 July 2002 at www.ragged-edge-mag.com/archive/look.htm; Adrian Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black,” in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 256–57, 266.
30. Derricotte, *Black Notebooks*, 145, 160, 182; Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black,” 234–38, 256–57, 262–64.
31. Derricotte, *Black Notebooks*, 142.
32. Ginsberg, *Passing*, 4.
33. Bannet, “Analogy As Translation,” 663.
34. This dynamic may also be observed from the role of passing in transgender contexts, in which the ability to pass for a new or different gender, or to present an ambiguous gender, is often experienced as a validation of radical identity rather than as assimilation or misrecognition.
35. To locate myself in my analysis, I refer to both femmes and people with nonvisible disabilities with the pronoun *we* throughout this section; however, I do not mean to imply that I speak for all femmes or all nonvisibly disabled people or that all people who share these identities think alike.

36. Joan Nestle, ed., *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* (Boston: Alyson, 1992), 16.
37. Cited in Ginsberg, *Passing*, 8.
38. Walker, *Looking Like What You Are*, 209–10.
39. Nestle, *Persistent Desire*, 15–16.
40. Walker, *Looking Like What You Are*, 11, 5.
41. Nestle, *Persistent Desire*, 18; Rebecca Ann Rugg, “How Does She Look?” in *Femme: Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls*, ed. Laura Harris and Elizabeth Crocker (New York: Routledge, 1997), 175.
42. See the pages referenced in note 10 for a discussion of this argument. One further distinction to be made here, however, is that the disbelieving gaze structuring the experience of the nonvisibly disabled subject may come not only from the normate but also from other disabled subjects. See Cal Montgomery, “A Hard Look at Invisible Disability,” *Ragged Edge*, no. 2 (2001): 16.
43. *Ibid.*, 16.
44. Madeline Davis, “Epilogue: Nine Years Later,” in Nestle, *Persistent Desire*, 270.
45. Nestle, *Persistent Desire*, 15.
46. Gaby Sandoval, “Passing *Loquería*,” in Harris and Crocker, *Femme*, 173. Sandoval adapts Gloria Anzaldúa’s description of being a lesbian of color as making for “*loquería*, the crazies” (*Borderlands*, 2d ed. [San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1999], 19).
47. Jones, a graduate student, once received a letter from her university, responding to her request for funds for assistance, “which essentially said, ‘We do not understand what you mean when you refer to yourself as ‘deaf-blind.’ When you were in the office the other day you seemed to function just fine’” (“‘Gee, You Don’t *Look* Handicapped . . .?’”). It took Jones a year of procuring letters from every authority imaginable to receive the necessary funding. This dynamic is not unusual, but it is brought up frequently in conversations among people with nonvisible disabilities. As Hamilton observes, responding to Jones’s story, many students with nonvisible disabilities are forced to “‘pass’ as ‘normal’ students, making sophisticated compensation strategies in order to complete our requirements and research, at which point, when we hit barriers . . . sure enough, we aren’t disabled enough—thanks to the success of previous compensation efforts” (“Oh the Joys of Invisibility!”).
48. I have experienced this harassment many times, as has every nonvisibly disabled person with a parking permit I have asked about it.
49. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 203–5, 201.
50. Hogeland, “*Invisible Man* and Invisible Women,” 36.
51. Jones, “‘Gee, You Don’t *Look* Handicapped . . .?’”
52. Montgomery observes that “although [the disability community] may understand disability differently than others do, we have not, as a group, abandoned the suspicion of

people who may not be ‘really’ disabled, who may be ‘slacking’ or ‘faking’ or encroaching on ‘our’ movement and ‘our’ successes. And we respond to people who challenge *our* ideas of what disabled people are ‘really like’ just as nondisabled people do: with suspicion” (“Hard Look at Invisible Disability,” 16).

53. Rugg, “How Does She Look?” 176.
54. Walker, *Looking Like What You Are*, 203. Furthermore, “Butler’s genealogy rests on deconstructing the normative paradigm that figures a correspondence between sex, gender, and sexuality. In turn, this rests on an inner/outer distinction that ‘stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject.’ This binary locates the ‘self’ within the body and reads the body as reflection of the ‘truth’ of that self. . . . In a strategy of destabilization which relies on the visual performance of difference, the fact that no distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ identities is made visible on the surface of the femme’s body as it is on the drag queen’s and the butch’s bodies marginalizes the femme” (204–5). For more on Butler’s original claims see Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
55. Rugg, “How Does She Look?” 176.
56. Mykel Johnson, “Butchy Femme,” in Nestle, *Persistent Desire*, 397–98.
57. Rugg, “How Does She Look?” 180.
58. Mary Frances Platt, “Reclaiming Femme . . . Again,” in Nestle, *Persistent Desire*, 388–89.
59. Sharon Wachsler, “Still Femme,” in Brownworth and Russo, *Restricted Access*, 111–12, 114.
60. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 102. I use the term *mestiza* with acute awareness of its racial and cultural references. While many of the authors I refer to are white or Anglo, Anzaldúa’s term appears to be an appropriate and accurate description of the consciousness that they reveal, and the application of her theoretical terms to disability seems a logical extension of her own compelling interest in the “magical,” boundary-crossing potential of “abnormality and so-called deformity” (41).
61. Sandoval, “Passing *Loquería*,” 170–71.
62. Willy Wilkinson, “Stealth,” in Munson, *Stricken*, 81.